Indian Historical Records Commission

Forty-first Session,

Trivandrum, 9-11 October 1971.

The 41st Session of the Indian Historical Records Commission was held on 9-11 October 1971 at the Kanakakunnu Palace Trivandrum under the auspices of the Government of Kerala. Before the function started, a group photograph of the members present was taken along with Shri Venkata Viswanathan, Governor of Kerala, who had kindly consented to inaugurate the Session, Shri C.H.Mohammed Koya, Minister of Education, Government of Kerala and Dr.George Jacob, Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University.

Apart from the two business meetings of the Commission held on the 10th and discussion meeting on "Religio-Political Movements in India in the 19th Century" held on the forenoon of the 11th October 1971, the delegates were invited to a number of social and cultural programmes beginning with the State dinner given by the Minister of Education, Government of Kerala on the 9th evening. On the 10th October the Kerala History Association held a Reception in their honour as a part of its silver jubilee celebrations and on the 11th the Mayor of Kerala was <u>At-Home</u> to the delegates. In addition to these, the delegates were taken to the famous Kovalam beach and to Kanya Kumari and other historical places <u>en-route</u>.

List of members who attended the session is appended at the end.

<u>Inaugural Function</u>

The inaugural function was held on the afternoon of the 9th October at the Kanakakunnu Palace. The proceedings started with the following Welcome Address of Shri C.H. Mohammed Koya:

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

I deem it a great privilege and have much pleasure in welcoming you to this beautiful and historic city, the capital of Kerala. It is a rare opportunity to have such a get-together of eminent historians, academicians, administrators, and distinguished scholars like you. We are lucky to have with us His Excellency Shri V. Viswanathan, the Governor of Kerala who has kindly agreed to inaugurate the Session. His interest in the pursuit of knowledge is a trait worthy of emulation by us all. We look forward towards of wisdom and guidance from him, on this historic oecasion.

"The Central Education Minister who is the Ex-Officio President of the Indian Historical Records Commission cannot, unfortunately for us, be with us to preside over this session of the Commission. We cordially and heartily welcome the Minister of State for Eeucation Prof. S. Nurul Hasan, who is, as you all know, an eminent historian and formerly the Director of Centre of Advanced Studies in Medieval History of the well known University of Aligarh and who has graciously agreed to preside over today's function though in absentia. He will be arriving a little later this evening. I am indeed very happy to welcome Dr. George Jacob, the Vice-Chancellor, Kerala University, who has so kindly agreed to inaugurate the exhibition of archival materials displayed in connection with the Session and to release the Commemoration Volume highlighting 'Kerala and Her Culture'. I hope you, the distinguished scholars, delegates and others who have come from various parts of the country to participate in this

Conference, will have a purposeful session and a happy stay. I would request you to bear with us for any inconvenience you might experience. My team of officers would be willing to render help whenever required. We extend our special welcome and thanks to Dr. Prasad and his band of energetic officers who arrived here earlier to help with the arrangements for the conference.

Though Kerala is rich in historical monuments and records, very few scholars have been able to adequately explore the rich and hidden sources of history. Historians who turn to the study of Kerala in ancient and medieval periods have loudly lamented the lack of any records for these periods. It would not be incorrect to mention that the abundant source materials of history that are in different archives in India relating to Kerala have been ignored in codyfying the history of this part of the country and her people. Needless to say, this unscientific method makes the history of these periods nothing better than conjecture. It is from scholars, researchers and academicians, much more than Government, that initiative must come for proper upkeep, preservation and maintenance of records. For, from the point of view of the nation, inevitably, archives cannot have as much of a priority, as efforts to produce more for ensuring a decent standard of living. Viewed this way, what Governments have done in this field so far are commendable, though a great deal remains to be tackled. One of the chief thrusts of this conference would be to focus the attention of the public to the vital role that is played by archives in the compiling of the history of the nation or State and what measures could be attempted to bridge the present inadequacy in this sphere.

"While little can be done by us to restore the lost archival treasures of the country, it is certainly within our power to prevent existing records from getting lost or damaged through sheer neglect. Anyone who has attempted to do research on any aspect of Kerala history must have experienced a sense of frustration, for even records that date back 100 years are difficult to come by. We need to collect and index all our invaluable records in such a manner that they can be traced out easily on requisition. Scientific devices of management need to be adopted so that old records are not destroyed or burned without evaluating their worth and only what is really necessary is preserved. This kind of approach requires not only money and training but a proper attitude to the whole question. In other words, dedication by the concerned people is of prime importance. A proposal to organise the Archives of Kerala on modern and scientific lines is already afoot and my officers are working at it. I bring this matter before the Indian Historical Records Commission with the firm confidence that the Commission would use its good offices to get financial assistance from all likely sources. Once more I welcome you most cordially and wish the Session every success.

Thank you.

JAI HIND"

Inaugurating the session, Shri V. Viswanathan, Governor of Kerala, addressed the audience in the following words:

"Honourable Education Minister, Dr. Prasad, Vice-Chancellor, Ladies & Gentlemen,

"This is the third time that the annual session of the Indian Historical Records Commission is being held in Trivandrum. On this occasion, my first duty is to extend a very warm welcome to all of you delegates who have come from different parts of India to participate in the deliberations of this conference. You will find Kerala one of the most beautiful, and one of the cleanest spots in India. Trivandrum, you will discover, is one of the most beautiful cities of our country. I only hope that those who have been responsible for inviting you here will make adequate arrangements to provide you opportunities of going round and seeing something of the beautiful places in the State. I also hope that those who invited you here will take the trouble to see that your stay during the few days in our State is made comfortable.

"We are all gathered here as people interested in historical records. The collection, the preservation, the management of these records will serve for writing history. You are dealers in the raw materials of history. You are handling the bricks and mortar with which the mansions of history are built up. But surely your interest lies deeper than that. Many of you are eminent historians, not merely archivists and recorders, and must have reflected from time to time, must have studied the philosophy and the purposes of history. History is only one of the many branches of human knowledge. What are the similarities and what are differences between this branch of knowledge and the body of human

knowledge as a whole. In the course of the millenniums during which man has pursued knowledge, he has discovered that knowledge has several aspects. Knowledge is a thing that the earliest man pursued for its own sake. He was moved by the wonder and the awe which every thing, and particularly the forces of nature, exercised upon him. They, the ancients, desired to know things for themselves; to acquire knowledge as its own aim, which has been the first and foremost impulse in all search for knowledge. In the course of our development later, we have discovered utilitarian purposes in knowledge. We discovered that knowledge is power, that knowledge also helps to improve the human being himself. But is the science of history different from other branches of human knowledge? For example, can we claim that history is a philosophy with a well-knit scheme of its own? There has been considerable discussion on this matter, particularly during the last few centuries. Is there a design or a pattern in history? Is there a plan which history follows? Is there a cyclic process in history? The earlier philosophers tried to maintain that history moves in cycles. Does "history, like an idiot, repeat itself"; All these discussions have so far led us nowhere. Nobody will or can exactly say that he can discover a design in history, that there is a set course in human events; that there is that there is a pattern which the history unfolds; that there is some cycle which history follows. And, therefore, as in the farthest reaches of physical sciences like physics and astro-physics, you must, after all these speculations into the deep unknown, come back and be content with the study of

history as an empirical day to day business. Let us absorb more, let us study human nature. But there is one thing that is quite clear. After all what is human history? What is the role, the span of human history, which is not very much more than five thousand years, and the earliest part of this five thousand years is still unknown, and most of it is buried under the soil of this earth. During these five thousand years, biological evolution has taken hardly a step. (Other natural phenomena take millions of years to develop.) Human knowledge, technical progress, science, has sought during the last two to three hundred years full mastery over nature. Technological progress has realised for us many of the dreams of man. We have also discovered the most dangerous thing; that knowledge is power. With the fast evolution of scientific objective knowledge, man's enormous power has grown at the same proportion. Man to-day is faced with this problem: that his power is now keeping pace with human evolution. He has become so powerful a source for good and for evil, for the reconstruction of the world and for the complete destruction of this world; and yet he finds that his wisdom has lagged behind. He does not know how to use this power. The reason is: that human nature, the motivations of human conduct, have not evolved with even a small fraction of the speed with which all knowledge has evolved. Power or knowledge has grown. Human conduct, human behaviour, the reaction of human beings towards the other human beings, the situations in which his own sentiments are involved are the regions which have remained more or less static over a period of 5000 years which covers the span of history. This may or may not be desirable. I am

not concerned here with the ethics of the matter. But this means that if we study human nature, if we study human history, we study how man has conducted himself in the face of one situation after another, in each situation how exactly he behaved, how exactly had he conducted himself, what measure of success had he achieved at one moment and what humiliations had he suffered at the other. This is a record of mankind for the last 5000 years. If you study this, as I said, the progress of this type in man's evolution is so slow that all that history has to tell you is just as it was 2000 years ago. That, therefore, becomes one of the most important utilitarian purposes of the study of history. This is particularly important to those who would conduct the affairs of mankind: to those who would rule mankind; those who aspire to be princes and emperors; those who aspire to be ministers and chief ministers; those who aspire to be administrators. This is of great significance.

"Coming to our own country we have to see what lessons our own history has for us. How do we study our own history, and where are the relevant records for the earlier period of our history, in the days when the land was mainly Hindu. The Hindus, it is said, had no sense of history. They had the Puranas, full of myths and legends and occasional dynastic lists. Mind, you, the legends of our people are not entirely imaginary. They are based on a hard core around which their story was woven. They are relevant records of that period. Except these, we shall have to go to the odd inscriptions by minor rulers, gold or copper coins, and it

will be very difficult for us to construct a connected story of our own, a story of the past.

"Then came the Muslims. Muslims have always been interested in recording contemporary events or events of the recent past. When the first Muslim invader came, a very learned man, Alberuni also came. He showed great interest, met people and learnt Sanskrit. Then take Firishta at Bijapur. You may say that some of their records lack objectivity. But human beings are never completely objective. A completely objective human being is inhuman. Every human being is subjective. And they recorded. And that is how our recorded history begins. With their interpretations we may agree or we may not agree, but that was really history.

"But we now come to another period with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, and the chaos which resulted in anarchy. 1707-1818 was the period of confusion. There is no comparison between the system of Government now in India and the system of Government before 1707. There is nothing in the world to compare the two. The whole structure of the administration and rule of law or justification for Government action, has been evolved in the last 200 years. The foundation was laid in the first half, and in the second, the administrative structure was set up. That period is the true foundation of today's Government, of our very Constitution, our concept of democracy. We had no concept of social organisation before. There was nothing more of Government than either benevolent or malevolent dictatorship. There was no such thing as law, there was no such thing as people collecting together to amend

the laws. The foundations of our modern administration in India were laid in these 200 years, 1700 to 1900. That period, to begin with, has a lot of records in the India Office, whatever records may or may not have been kept in India. The East India Company maintained correspondence and records. This consists of two kinds of records - one is papers in the government offices and the papers in the government offices in this period are very different from the papers of the Muslim chroniclers. In those papers, records, correspondence, different people could set forth arguments for and against the particular course of action. Not only correspondence but the notes on files that various authorities have made which we always refer to as minutes. Now, those minutes and those books and correspondence are different from earlier records.

"They first set forth the opinions of people, then set forth the defence and criticism of different suggested courses of action, and they finally record the decision taken. If you look at them today, you not only know what was decided, but who held what view, what were the merits of each particular decision. Administrators, in so far as relevent in their today's problems, will be wiser after a study of these records. That is one part. That period of 1700-1900 was also a great time for builders of the British Empire in India. The true founders of the modern system of Government in India mainly were men like Warren Hastings, Wellesley, Malcolm, Elphinstone, Tod and Thompson, the great administrators in the Punjab, the Lawrence brothers, and so many others. These people have left behind their own stories. They have left the record of their

experiences, the actions they took, and the various reasons which brought them to different decisions. And to the administrators of today, and to the politicians of today, the best advice that I can give on this occasion is: go deep into the personal memoirs of those people, Malcolm and Elphinstone and others of their contemporaries. You will learn a great deal not only about Indian history but also how to manage people, how to govern people, how to run the administration of this country. This administrative process continued and that is how we have now very valuable records at India Office, and they are likely to remain there. They are valuable to our scholars. We are ourselves building up our own system of archives. It means we are making good progress. Preservation of records is necessary. But, as the Hindu philosophy tells you, you cannot preserve without destroying. You cannot preserve all the records. In the preservation of records, the most important thing is what is destroyed. Therefore, weeding out of records is as important as selection of records for preservation. Do not keep all the rubbish and the junk and the things of ephemeral value and clutter up the archives. Then, how to conserve them, how to preserve them by modern scientific methods and how to give facilities, subject to State Acts, to all scholars to have access to them:

"You have selected for this particular Session, a special subject "Religio-Political Movements in India in the 19th century". I am very glad that you have taken the movement in the 19th century, as that happens to be one of the most significant periods in the process of our modern religio-political evolution. I am going to talk to you now about

what the Hindus did about religion in the old times. They in their own way discussed many things. But what happens when hammer blows come from outside? What is the reaction? This is the way to look at 19th century history. What happens not merely in isolation, when you are living by youself. What happens when the hammer blow of an invader comes and hits? The first impact of the Muslim invasion - and the Muslim invasion came when Hinduism had reached a particularly low point of decadence, was bound to cause a dent. There was intercourse between these two cultures and civilisations. In that fermentation you may notice that the Hindus out of their ancient philosophy dug out the Bhakti cult, and the figures of Surdas, Kabir and Tulsidas come into prominence. They gave up speculation, they gave up intellectual investigations and took to the Bhakti Marga or dedication to God. Out of the Bhakti Marga, came a new literature, and there was revival of the ancient dialects of the country, gradually evolving into modern Indian languages. Out of the impact of Islam on Hinduism came also the rise of Bhakti Marga itself. Kabir and Surdas and Nanak and Govind, and the Sikh religion, arose as a result of that impact. But all that was being wasted away by the 17th or 18th century. This time the circumstances were different. The foreigner discovered Sanskrit for the Hindus. The Hindus had forgotten their Sanskrit. The foreigner did a lot of work into the past for India. The foreigner brought science from the West. He brought another new religion. Islam, so far had produced an impact on the religion of Hinduism. But Europeans brought western sciences, rationalism, and new social obligations;

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Indian Historical Records Commission,
(National Archives of India)
Janpath,
New Delhi-1, the ... 1972.

Subject:- Indian Historical Records Commission - Proceedings of the 41st Session held at Trivandrum in October 1971.

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Dear Sir,

I am sending herewith a copy of the proceedings of the 41st Session of the Indian Historical Records Commission held at Trivandrum in October, 1971 for favour of your information and action, if any.

Kindly acknowledge its receipt.

Yours faithfully,

M.L. Ahluwalia

for Secretary,
Indian Historical Records Commission.